

put your head on my shoulder by The_Doom_Dahlia

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Alternate Universe - Modern Setting, Autistic Jonathan Byers, Barbara "Barb" Holland Lives, Dungeons and Dragons, F/F, Fake/Pretend Relationship, Flashback, Jane Hopper gets to be happy, M/M, Milkshakes, Snow Ball (Stranger Things), Squirrel Girl - Freeform, Steve is still team mom, Steve's trying to guess Barb's middle name, and they're both gonna show up later with the rest of the kids, barb is a big nerd, barb's gonna be the second team mom, billy is a scum bag, but eleven's gonna be okay and so is will, cherries, hawkins lab still did awful things, the kids deserve happiness, there's no demogorgon, this isn't gonna end up being hetero, we're gonna get more of autistic jon in chapter 4

Language: English

Characters: (benny's only mentioned rn but he'll get more lines later promise), Barbara "Barb" Holland, Benny Hammond, Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jonathan Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Max (Stranger Things), Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Barbara "Barb" Holland/Nancy Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Steve Harrington, Steve Harrington & Barbara "Barb" Holland

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Summary:

steve harrington's had a lot of bad ideas.

this might be the first that actually works.

1. beginning

harringtons-offun: BARB

harringtons-offun: BAAAAAAAARB

harringtons-offun: BARBARA

harringtons-offun: BARBARA HOLLAND

harringtons-offun: BARBARA NANCY HOLLAND

holland1945: that's not my middle name

holland1945: also how did you get my discord info

harringtons-offun: I KNEW YOU WERE ONLINE! How are you?
How's your

harringtons-offun: fuckin

harringtons-offun: glasses and stuff!

holland1945: what do you want steve you only message me if you want something

harringtons-offun: c'mon can't i talk to my old pal barb ethel holland?

holland1945: also not my middle name

harringtons-offun: ...look, can i talk to you about something? meet me at benny's at six?

holland1945: if you 'carrie' me or some shit, i'm going to get nancy to destroy you

harringtons-offun: i thought you'd be the one to destroy me

holland1945: i'm a gentle giant. see you at benny's, hair-gel

“So, let me get this straight-”

A stifled laugh from Steve, his mouth full of french fries, stopped Barb for a second. The lights in *Benny's* flickered and buzzed, crackling with life despite the nearly empty tables below them. She could faintly hear ‘Sincerely’ by the Moonglows in the background, mingling with the fryer’s hissing and the football game coverage on Benny’s tinny little radio. Her eyes narrowed behind her glasses, staring down Steve Harrington with an irritation reserved for pop quizzes and busted record players.

He grew silent. She didn’t.

“You want me to pretend to date you, hold your hand, Snow Ball, all of that jazz...so you can make Jonathan Byers jealous.”

“Yup.” He nods, popping the ‘p’ and smiling as though his plan was intensely clever.

It wasn’t, and Barb didn’t get it. Steve Harrington, ‘King Steve’, had started a road to redemption after last year, when Nancy had broken up with him to date Jonathan Byers after supporting him through his brother’s kidnapping and subsequent return with a girl in tow. Apparently the Hawkins Power and Light Company was a lot more sinister than people had thought, a front for some weird MK Ultra shit. Now Will Byers was in therapy and slowly recovering, Jane Hopper was the brightest mind in the eighth grade, and Steve Harrington was, presumably, trying to not be an asshole so he could win Nancy’s heart again. He’d even cleaned the ‘Nancy ‘THE SLUT’ Wheeler’ graffiti off the marquee of the *Hawk*, an act done in a fit of bitterness that hadn’t made anything better. It was easy to assume that Steve wanted Nancy back.

But assumptions weren’t always right.

“No.”

He groaned, laying his head down on the table. “C’mon, Barbara Louise Holland!”

“That’s not my middle name-also why aren’t you asking Nancy, that

would make so much more sense!”

“I can’t ask my ex to do this! That would be weird!” he argued, as though asking his ex’s best friend to do it was any less weird. “Look, I need someone to help me do this, and I need that someone to be a person I know at least sort of well. I can’t ask Nancy, Carol scares me, every other girl in school barely knows me, and all of my other female friends are either people’s moms or like twelve. You, Barbara Thelma Holland, are my only hope.”

“So, I’m your Obi-Wan Kenobi?” she asked, raising an eyebrow.

“You bet! And I’ll make it worth your while too.” he grinned. He realized how gross that could sound when he saw her wrinkle her nose in disgust. “I meant with money, I swear.”

“God I hope so.” she almost gagged at the idea, her lesbianism solidified once more. After years of boys making a pass at her to get to Nancy, her attraction to girls was practically made of platinum and coated in diamond dust. “Look, if this is some kind of stupid prank and Jonathan ends up being covered in dog shit or pig’s blood or whatever-”

“It’s not, I swear. God, you’re paranoid.”

“Don’t fucking interrupt me, Steve.” she instructed, her voice getting cold. “If this is a prank, I swear I will destroy you. I might be a gentle giant, but I won’t hesitate to get revenge if this ends up hurting anyone: that means socially, mentally, physically, any other way you can think of.” she hissed through clenched teeth. “Jealousy is one thing, a broken heart is another. I know that from experience with Nance. If this goes sideways and someone gets scarred, I will grab you by that popped collar of yours and drag you into the depths my-fucking-self, are we clear?”

He looked about ready to crack a joke, when he saw how deadly serious she was taking all of this. Instead, he just nodded. “Crystal.”

“The furthest you’ll get with me is a kiss on the cheek. That’s it.” she informed him.

“I can work with that.”

She nodded, wondering if she should have written up a contract or something, or gotten him to seal the deal with a blood pact. She decided against it though. Too messy. Instead, she reached out her hand. “Well, Harrington, I guess you have a deal.” she said, shrugging a little. Her eyebrow raised as Steve reflexively raised his hand towards his mouth (she realized later that he was probably going to spit in it as some kind of strange, gross binding moment) before shaking his head a little to himself and shaking her hand.

“You’re not gonna regret this! This is gonna go so well, it’ll turn you on your head!” he crowed, overjoyed. He leaned his head out of the booth, calling out to Benny who was busily making a few burgers in the back of the restaurant. “Hey! Benny! When you’re done, a milkshake for me and my date, Barb Nadine Holland, please!”

“Two milkshakes and that’s not my middle name!” Barb amended, looking first to Benny and then to Steve.

As he laughed, Barb put her head in her hands and sighed to herself. She didn’t know what strange plan she’d been talked into, but she knew that things were going to get very interesting and very weird for a while. All she could do was hope that Steve knew what he was doing.

2. car rides

Summary for the Chapter:

the kids appear and barb and steve start their plan

Steve had zero idea what he was doing.

Now, that phrase could have represented him at any stage of his life, yes, but it fit even more so now. He wasn't the king of the school anymore, he had a crush on the only person in the world who could be more brooding than Morrissey, and he was now dating the school's biggest nerd in order to make him jealous. His life had been shotgunned from the comfortable chair he'd been in for so long and he didn't know whether he was miserable or overjoyed by that fact.

Oh, and the mob of middle schoolers in the back of his car probably wasn't helping either.

"Steve!" Dustin called out again, gently smacking him on the shoulder from the back seat. "You gotta answer the question!"

Steve blinked a few times. "What's the question, my dude?"

"Would Captain America lose in a fight against Batman?"

"Oh totally dude."

"See!?" Dustin called out to the very back of the van, pointing at Mike with a wide smile.

"But Captain America's pumped full of muscle and he has a shield! What does Batman have!?" Mike argued.

"He has brains and gadgets." Will mentioned off-handedly, attempting to play Pokemon with Lucas. "And martial arts training and shit!"

"And the Robins." Jane piped up softly, pulling her jacket closer around her. She never seemed warm enough, Steve noticed, but he figured warmth - of any kind - hadn't come easy where she'd come

from. So he always cranked up the heat despite it overwhelming him a little. The kid deserved to be comfortable after everything that happened. They all did.

“Whose side are you on?” Mike asked her, but couldn’t stop himself from smiling at her.

“Hey, Steve, why’re we going up this hill?” Max finally asked, looking up from the little Game Boy Lucas had bought her last year for her birthday. “This isn’t the way to the middle school, dipshit.” she reminded him, flicking the back of his head.

“I need to pick up someone.” Steve informed her, driving slowly up the plasticine pink flamingo lined dirt road that lead up to the Holland home. A few deer peered out from the forest around them, watching attentively as they crawled up to the place, careful to stop before Patsy, the sleepy-eyed St. Bernard the Hollands adopted, could get too close to the moving vehicle. The house was small and well-designed, with wide windows lined with pastel colored curtains and a pair of bird feeders out front, standing guard like sentinels.

Standing between them, bundled in a black jacket and a yellow skirt fluttering from the dress beneath it, was Barb. She usually rode up to school with Nancy, but figured that for Steve’s plan to work, she’d have to ride with him. However, that plan did not include a mob of children.

“What’s up, Barb Sherry Holland?” Steve called out, saluting from his driver’s seat spot. There was a roar of kids saying ‘Hi’ from the back, mingled with the continued argument over the power of Captain America versus Batman. “I kept Dustin from grabbin’ shotgun so you could sit up front with me!” he proclaimed, patting the chair and grinning at her.

“First off, that’s not my middle name, and second, why is your car filled with kids?” she asked, sighing a little and hoping that it wasn’t some weird scheme.

“I’m driving them to the middle school! It’s what I do. Girls dig guys who are good to kids.” Steve grinned, fingergunning towards her. ‘*So do dudes.*’ he thought, but didn’t say aloud. Instead he asked her to

hop in and, after petting her dog goodbye, she did.

“Barb, we need your opinion. Who would win in a fight: Captain America or Batman?” Mike asked, leaning as far as his seatbelt would allow and making eye contact with her. The seriousness in his voice made everyone pay attention, looking towards their new car-mate for guidance.

“Squirrel Girl.” she answered immediately, fishing a water bottle from her backpack and taking a sip.

The kids looked confused, eyes darting between one another. “Who’s Squirrel Girl?” Lucas finally asked, the rest of the kids nodding in mutual curiosity.

Any concerns over the nature of the kids’ presence in Steve’s car faded with that question, Barb’s mind going into a laser focused state as she turned to look properly at the kids. “Squirrel Girl is the best superhero there is. She can communicate with squirrels and she has superhuman strength, but most of the time she uses compassion to defeat her enemies. She’s friends with Galactus and Kraven the Hunter, and wants to get an education while saving the world. She treasures her friends and her squirrels and everyone around her.” she finished, eyes glimmering a little with happiness.

The car was silent, save for the noises of the machinery around them, the kids contemplating this new knowledge and Steve focused on the road ahead. Finally, Jane spoke up, her eyes glimmering just like Barb’s. “Bitchin.”

The car erupted in conversation, as if it were a shaken up soda bottle that finally burst. By the time they got to the Middle School, Barb had promised to loan her comics to them so they could learn about more female superheroes and the kids asked if she could come to one of their D&D games someday (she said she would consider it, and Max and Jane began formulating a character for her to play at her request). The kids waved as they went inside, and Barb and Steve drove on towards the high school.

“...why’d you drive them to school?” she asked curiously.

“Me and Dustin have a weird kind of connection. A couple months back, when we had that weird feral dog infestation in town, he ended up adopting one of them. Named it D’Artagnan, Dart for short. The dog got loose and since everyone was busy with shit, he asked me to help find him. We ended up bonding while we tried to find him, and he’s stuck around since. After we got close, the others kind of dogpiled on me and brought me into their group. I think what really got me in though was fighting Billy.”

Barb winced, gritting her teeth. Billy Hargrove was one of Hawkins’s local scumbags, him and his father both. Everyone seemed to fawn over him, not realizing how much of a monster he was until the day after Steve had been knocked out cold by Billy while trying to defend the kids from him. Then word had spread about why the fight had happened and Billy became an outcast. Max, his little sister and a frequent target of his and his father’s beastliness, had even been taken in by the Sinclairs after the truth had come out.

“I’m kind of like a team dad now...guys dig that, right? Compassion and all that jazz?” Steve asked her. Her responding shrug made him do the same as he parked in front of the high school. His concern faded into a mask of ‘chill’ as he adjusted his coat and got out of the car, her following. “Well Barbara Anne, shall we?” He grinned cockily and crooked out his arm for her to take.

“That’s not my middle name.” she rolled her eyes and took his arm. “Are you absolutely sure this is gonna work? I mean, have you even really thought about all of this? What if Jonathan doesn’t get jealous, or he does but nothing happens. I want you to succeed but that doesn’t mean you will.” she told him bluntly.

“I know that.” he shrugged, the grin only faltering a little. “But I gotta try, Barb. Trying’s all I have left.”

She sighed. “Alright. But don’t blame me if this doesn’t work.” she said gently and, arm-in-arm, the two walked into the school.

Notes for the Chapter:

squirrel girl is the best and i hope you liked this chapter

3. cherries and their pits

Summary for the Chapter:

nancy finds out about barb and steve and i try to make cherries into a motif in this story

Notes for the Chapter:

mentions of anaphylaxis in this chapter

Nancy Wheeler, sitting comfortably outside of the school beside her boyfriend, Jonathan, had a realization the morning of January 15th. It crept upon her, crawling up her spine beneath the Glass Animals t-shirt and jacket she wore over her frame and leaping upon her mind like an enraged cat. She'd been nestled in close to Jon in silence, since he wasn't very verbal that day after a long night spent in the darkroom. But it was alright. He didn't need to talk for them to feel close to one another. It just came naturally.

The claws of the realization struck as the BMW Steve drove parked, nudging into another spot on sheer accident (he was never the best driver, not even when they were together), and the doors opened with both passengers leaving almost at once. The epiphany was simply this: she had only felt a pit in her stomach twice in her life, and both times involved her best friend, her platonic soulmate, the person she felt closest to: Barbara Holland.

The first was when they were merely children at Nancy's eighth birthday party. The celebration was unicorn themed, soaked in rainbows and caked in glitter, and the entire kindergarten class of Hawkins Elementary was there. But Nancy didn't care much about them, finding them boring and pretty annoying. Instead, she stayed close to Barb and nestled in against her. She was safe and friendly, like a teddy bear fresh out of the drier.

Her mother had just brought out the cake, a beautiful thing with cherry filling since cherries were Nancy's favorite fruit. After a round of 'happy birthday' with Nancy preening under the attention, flapping and hugging herself tightly in delight (joined in the embrace

by Barb), Ted cut the cake and put out pieces for all of the kids.

It was a couple seconds of peace as the kids began to eat. Then Barb gagged suddenly and collapsed to the ground and Nancy's stomach dropped, a pit larger than any she'd ever known growing inside her as she screamed for help. It turned out that Barb was deathly allergic to cherries (a fact that even she hadn't known), but luckily Karen had an EpiPen for emergencies. The pit faded a little as her mother assured her that Barb would be okay, but it only left when Barb returned to school on the next Tuesday. Until then, the pit burned and sunk inside her and made her feel awful.

That feeling returned that cold January day as she watched Barb and Steve walking towards them hand in hand. Steve looked smug as always (he wasn't really, Nancy knew that, but he did his best to look it) while Barb was just trying to move quickly and get out of the cold. Which is why she looked a little irritated when Steve stopped them and gestured grandly to her.

"Lady and gentledude, welcome my new girlfriend Barb Holland Holland."

Barb looked at him incredulously. "Holland Holland, *really*- hey." she sighed, rolling her eyes with a smile.

"You two are a thing? That's awesome!" Nancy called out, trying to resist the strange forced squeak her voice wanted to become. "How'd this happen?"

"We'll tell you later!" Steve said. Something like panic flashed in his eyes as he looked at Barb. "C'mon, let's get inside. I'm cold as fuck out here." he piped up, wrapping an arm around Jonathan and asking him excitedly about his weekend, looking at Jonathan's hands after realizing he couldn't speak. He'd been getting better at interpreting sign, and Nancy wasn't sure who he was doing it for beyond the obvious.

"So...Steve,huh?" Nancy asked, turning on her heel and making eye contact with Barb.

"Yeah, Steve. I'll explain it later." Barb assured her, squeezing the

straps of her bag before following the boys inside. She looked tired, but happy.

Nancy didn't understand why she couldn't feel completely happy for her. Couldn't understand why there was a growing pit in her gut and the taste of cherries began to bloom across her tongue. There had to be a reason for this, this stirring worry and pain inside her. Determination stabbed her in the heart and she stood up straighter. She'd find out what was going on, hell or high water. Quickly, she caught up to Barb and stayed close by her side for the day.

Steve explained it during lunch, that Barb had been acting as his tutor for math and they'd just hit it off. He said it all with glimmers in his eyes, although Nancy couldn't tell whether or not the brightness was for his new girlfriend or if it was for someone else. It was like a swinging lightbulb, flitting about restlessly without any sign of settling. His eyes had been like that with her too.

Was it jealousy, was that the aching darkness inside her?

No, it couldn't be. Not only had she not been jealous when Barb almost died at her party, but she was over Steve by a country mile.

Barb seemed happy enough with him, her usual self. All rosy cheeks and darkly painted nails, talking about her comic books with fervor once the subject of their relationship had faded. The lighting was dim on their end of the cafeteria, one of the bulbs in the light above them starting to burn out. But strangely, it almost made a halo around Barbara's head, the faded glow only accentuating the warmth of her cheeks and the fire of her hair. Nancy didn't understand why she was so transfixed on these things, so she didn't mention it.

Before Nancy left that day, she stood with Barb outside of the school. They were in the parking lot as everyone drove off, Jonathan having been picked up by Joyce to run errands, standing in a corner to stay safe and splitting the contents of a thermos of hot chocolate raided from home economics class.

"I'm happy for you and Steve, y'know? You two seem really happy." Nancy said sincerely, looking up at the taller girl with warmth that could almost block out the chill of the Hawkins' winter.

“Thanks, Nance. It means a lot to me that you’re cool with this.”

“But I have to ask...why him? You’ve never gone out with any boys before, what was the difference with Steve?”

Barb stood there silently, and Nancy watched as her eyes began to flicker with nerves. She opened her mouth to answer, but then a loud horn split the air.

“C’mon babe! We gotta pick up the kids from the middle school or Dustin’s gonna kick my ass!” Steve called out, waving towards Nancy. Nancy waved back, a sharp scratch of pain striking her when she processed the ‘babe’.

The taller girl almost seemed to shrink in relief. “I gotta go. I’ll call you tonight, okay? Stay warm.” she instructed, hugging Nancy warmly before getting into the car and riding off with Steve to go pick up her little brother and his friends.

Nancy stood alone in the parking lot of the high school, clutching the thermos and thinking in silence. A thousand thoughts rushed through her head, all centered around crimson hair and a relationship that almost seemed clandestine, until she acknowledged that her mother and step-father weren’t coming to pick her up and she began the trek home through the snow.

The taste of cherries lingered, now more bitter and sharp, and the pit only grew.

Nancy didn’t know how to stop either, but she’d dig and dig until she knew, no matter how much her heart began to ache.

Notes for the Chapter:

jonathan's gonna talk next chapter y'all, i'm gonna try and write from a dude's point of view!

Author's Note:

i listened to the same paul anka song over and over again while listening to this. that's why it's called 'put your head on my shoulder'

hope y'all enjoy!